Review
Reviewed Work(s): A Band of Prophets: The Vanderbilt Agrarians After Fifty Years by William C. Havard and Walter Sullivan
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A Band of Prophets: The Vanderbilt Agrarians After Fifty Years. Edited, with an Introduction, by William C. Havard and Walter Sullivan. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982. Pp. x, 191. $12.95.)

This collection—derived from a three-day symposium at Vanderbilt University, October 30-November 1, 1980—opens with a question posed by the editors, Professors William C. Havard and Walter Sullivan: Why has the "seemingly topical message" of *I'll Take My Stand*, "widely regarded initially as anachronistic or reactionary . . . commanded more and more credence with the passage of time"? They conclude that this continuing popularity stems from a recognition of the "Southern Manifesto" as a "prophetic book." This conviction also animates the panel discussion which concludes the volume. Moderated by Cleanth Brooks, this discussion reveals the current thinking of the surviving contributors to the 1930 collection: Lyle Lanier, Andrew Lytle, and Robert Penn Warren. Lytle and Warren observe the acceleration of threatening trends identified by the Agrarians a half-century before, and Lanier and Warren express mildly optimistic convictions that a mood more receptive to their message has evolved during the intervening fifty years. The three survivors are still willing to take their stand, and Brooks will stand with them.

Two of the essays provide historical contexts for *I'll Take My Stand*. The economic and social conditions of the South in the 1920's are effectively described by Charles P. Roland who generously acknowledges his sources while writing in a style that is a model of clarity and grace. George Core discusses the academic careers of the leading Agrarians, chronicling first the frustration created by the incomprehension of university administrators, and then the eventual ascendancy of the critical methods of the Fugitives and Agrarians. The New Criticism of Ransom, Tate, Brooks, and Warren finally came to dominate the critical quarterlies and the college classroom.

Robert B. Heilman and Louis D. Rubin, Jr., agree on several fundamental issues in their essays, even though they disagree mildly on the precise meaning of the term "pastoral." Rubin notes that the Agrarian vision contains an "imaginative, emotional appeal as well as a logical one." The book's cultural paradigm can thus be seen, in Heilman's phrase, as "conditionally symbolic." Furthermore, both see a true connection between symbolic structures and social action. Heilman defines the rhetorical character of Agrarian thought as a "dissent against the commercial, and then the industrial, dogma of well-being." To Rubin, *I'll Take My Stand* is a "pastoral rebuke to the dehumanizing forces present in mass industrial society."

John Shelton Reed sees a somewhat more literal intention behind the Agrarian program, but his own approach is creative and metaphoric. Reed's essay, a structuralist cultural analysis, provocatively extends the concept of "nationalism" in order to place the southern Agrarians in a world-historical context.

Lewis P. Simpson's essay continues his investigation into the emergence in modern history of a "Third Realm" of mind and letters. The Agrarians, he argues, saw themselves engaged in a struggle to reverse the modernist internalization of history in hopes of regaining a "consciousness of the webbed order to myth and tradition, always submissive to ritual, manners, and customs." Eventually, however, most of these Men of Letters were forced to recognize this struggle as "historical impossibility."

The whole collection is distinguished by lively intelligence and graceful writing, qualities which explain in large part the continuing importance of *I'll Take My Stand.*

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